

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 17:5-10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, But stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; In the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit. More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the LORD, alone probe the mind and test the heart, To reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

***Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.***

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked Nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, But delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night.

***Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.***

He is like a tree planted near running water, That yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers.

***Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.***

Not so, the wicked, not so; they are like chaff which the wind drives away. For the LORD watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

***Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.***

GOSPEL: Luke 16:19-31

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are

tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of Lent**

Every day, how many people do we have to trust? We can be in contact with many individuals during our day. Must we live in a constant state of suspicion and paranoia? When driving, don't we trust our fellow drivers to follow the traffic laws and drive safely? Don't they also trust that we will do the same? What is at the heart of Jeremiah's curse of us when we trust one another? A barren bush in a featureless and unchanging desert seems lonely as would we if we could trust no one. Trust God, the prophet admonishes. God does not deliver the mail or restock the shelves of the grocery store. People do. Trusting in God alone seems just as cursed to me. We need others just as we need God.

First, we believe as did Jeremiah. I am sure that his faith provided the context for his relationships as ours does for us. His prophecy and our experience approach living and relationships in the context of our faith in God. We can know God to be all around, within and among us. We have a context. There's no way you and I can trust another person devoid of our trust in God. As believers trust is reflexive. God has first entrusted to us God's love. We know this. We feel this. We believe this. Our response to others reflects how God has gifted us.

I had a friend who died a few years ago. He had adopted a dog from a shelter. The dog was smart, affectionate and active. The dog had one bad habit. He was a nipper. Fingers intended to pet him were his favorite target. Often when dogs do that, their behavior reveals how they were raised. They were separated from their mothers too young. This particular dog was found as a very young pup in a dumpster. He was found with a small stuffed llama. When my friend would buy his dog a new stuffed toy, he would deftly and quickly tear it to pieces; never the llama, though. It was his substitute mother. When the dog slept, he cuddled with it.

Dogs are weaned by the time they grow teeth. Nipping mom gets a nip back. Smart dogs learn never to bite the teat (or hand) that feeds. This pup never learned this lesson. The lesson not to nip needed to be learned. Our ability to trust someone else has come from being entrusted with life, family, faith and trust. This happens through the people around us. A grace we have received is a grace we all can share; with God and each other.

I suspect Jeremiah knew this. None of us can live in solitary confinement without scars. We need other people to thrive. Jeremiah's ministry was as a prophet, chosen by God, to serve God's people. His life was lived within the context of family and community given to him as God's gift. Jeremiah, as a result of God's message to God's people, got thrown into a dry

cistern. People pulled him out to save him; he never experienced any curse for trusting them. God saved him through them. Each of us can live, work, love and pray as God's instruments. God works through the people we trust and God works through us at the same time. Sharing God's gift of faith gives us perspective.

What of non-believers? God remains God. They have not yet received God's gift of faith. They may believe in God via a different path. Can we trust God here? God works in God's own way and time to save. God is the eternal now and patient. We have the sense of time and impatience. That may be our true curse to want God to work in our way and time. We have our limits; God has none. God also understands, fully, our limits. He sent Jesus to heal them. Trusting God, in this instance, is the path to God's blessing. God is just a thought away and our mystery of faith.

Most of us would like to see all the nasty people go to hell; winding up as the nasty, uncaring rich man. Whom could we send there? All of us can provide an answer. However, by our standards, that would ensure our place in eternal torment. Why? Because in order to put them there what do we have to do? Judge them! What has Jesus said about that? "The measure with which you measure will be measured back to you. Thank God that God is God and not you and me. Salvation is in God's hands and God is infinite, eternal and unconditional love. What does the unconditional part mean? God loves us even as people who don't deserve it.

One can spend a great deal of time to point out the elements of the rich man's life that got him into his final predicament. He lacked compassion and mercy for people who weren't his family. What of Lazarus? How did he find himself in the eternal, loving embrace of Abraham? Was it by being poor, homeless and living under someone's porch? Wouldn't God judge him by the same standards with which God judged the nameless rich guy? Being poor is not the path to salvation. Believing in God and in Jesus, which is God's gift of faith that we have, is.

Faith is what drives our behavior. We are to love sinners, our neighbors, our enemies and those who hurt us. Could Lazarus live in eternal peace knowing that just across an invisible wall, the rich man would be in torment? If he could, wouldn't he be living with a greater sin than the rich man? The rich man lived obliviously of Lazarus' plight. Could Lazarus live in bliss for having judged one who hurt him into hell? Could Lazarus be praying, "Thank God, I'm not like the rich man!" Is that prayer a response to another in faith? Jesus had something to say about prayers like that. Perhaps instead, he prayed, "God be merciful to sinners, of whom I am foremost." The prayer of the Pharisee and the prayer of Paul are both a choice we can make. Only with God's grace can we choose the right one.

May God's grace renew our hearts to love as God loves us.

James D. Beath  
March 17, 2022